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State agencies announce comprehensive substance abuse prevention strategy

Cross-agency effort aims to save lives, taxpayer dollars

The Department of Human Services today released the first statewide plan to tackle substance abuse and addiction in Minnesota. The [Minnesota State Substance Abuse Strategy \(PDF\)](#) calls for a multi-agency, multi-faceted approach to achieve a healthier, safer and stronger Minnesota.

The strategy was developed in collaboration with the state departments of corrections, education, health and public safety as well as the State Judicial Board, Minnesota National Guard and Minnesota Board of Pharmacy. It recommends close coordination among state agencies to prevent and address the far-reaching impacts of drug and alcohol abuse.

“Substance abuse is a serious and costly issue that affects us all,” said Human Services Commissioner Lucinda Jesson. “The long-term and immediate steps recommended in this comprehensive strategy will help save lives and dollars by making our prevention and treatment efforts more efficient and effective.”

Substance abuse exacts large costs to law enforcement, courts, corrections, human services, public health systems, and ultimately, Minnesota taxpayers. The Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University estimates that state governments spend 15.7 percent of their budgets, or more than \$135 billion collectively, each year dealing with abuse-related issues. A 2011 report from the Minnesota Department of Health showed the impact of alcohol use alone in Minnesota to be over \$5 billion a year.

The strategy’s long-term policy direction balances public safety, prevention, intervention, and treatment and recovery support services to reduce substance abuse. Among recommendations are integration of screening services in all health care settings and expanded development of recovery centers throughout the state. The strategy also calls for increased coordination among law enforcement to fight the production and sale of illegal drugs.

Currently the Department of Public Safety, through its Office of Justice Programs, is supporting drug task forces around the state. Composed of more than 200 investigators from over 115 police agencies, these task forces focus on major cases that have the potential to significantly reduce drug trafficking and related crimes. In 2011, they made 3,522 arrests for narcotics violations, 92 percent of which were at a felony-level.

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“State agencies are working together with stakeholders across Minnesota to deal with the changing nature of illegal substances,” said Mona Dohman, Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. “We’re listening to law enforcement and local officials so that we can employ appropriate strategies quickly and efficiently across the state.”

The strategy also identifies rapid growth in prescription opiate and heroin abuse as a leading issue and recommends immediate action in this area. Measures include increased participation by prescribers and pharmacists in the Prescription Monitoring Program, which tracks prescriptions for controlled substances, as well as training for physicians in addiction, prescribing opiates and alternative approaches to pain management.

“This comprehensive, collaborative effort tackles substance abuse in Minnesota head on,” said Carol Falkowski, State Substance Abuse Director. “Especially when it comes to our growing problems with prescription opiates and heroin, we need to turn the tide as soon as possible by being smart and working together.”

State leaders, substance abuse experts and medical professionals will discuss the strategy at community meetings in Duluth on Nov. 9 and Rochester on Nov. 14.